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THE COMMON THINGS OF NURSING

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THE title for this article was selected several months ago, and in the interval articles which have expressed the ideas I had in mind more ably than I am capable of doing have appeared in the JOURNAL. However, I suppose originality is not expected, and repetition is unavoidable.

A great deal has been, and will continue to be, written on the subject of the nurse's vocation. Now and then there may be women who have had that "direct calling" which is the generally accepted definition of vocation, but in my opinion the majority of nurses are women who have entered the field of nursing to earn a livelihood. That many—let us hope the majority—have so exalted an idea of the profession, and such love for the duties, that they work as women must who desire to attain the highest, we take for granted.

Higher education for nurses is everywhere being discussed, and there can be little doubt that it will add much to the usefulness of those nurses who have the intelligence to understand that the higher the education and the more varied and extensive the knowledge at her command, the greater is the necessity that she understand the common needs of the patient, the welfare of those into whose homes she is received. We are called to those of all classes—the rich, those of moderate means, and those who make sacrifices to have us.

That we are called to nurse the sick is true, but that is not all. It falls to us, in many cases, to restore order to a disordered household, confidence to a terror-stricken family. Often it is the mother who is ill, and in addition to the extra work illness entails, there falls on some maid-of-all-work those duties the mistress has always performed; and to us the duty of seeing that this work does not become too heavy. Is it not better that if we err, it be on the side of friendliness towards the servants? Are we not all servants—differing only in the quality of our service?

We read many discussions these days on such trivial questions as the following: "Shall the nurse wear white or stripes?" "Shall she wash or only rinse the baby's napkins?" "Can she with dignity wheel a baby carriage?" Do not these questions resolve themselves into a question of personal dignity? What can it matter if the uniform is white or striped, if only it is clean and worn by an earnest, self-respecting woman? What difference to her if the servant's dress is similar? Now, as always, dress fails to make a lady. When it becomes

necessary to assure our patients that we are ladies, words will not avail; the very use of them will be an argument against us.

No book of professional etiquette can decide just what the nurse may do or leave undone; her own good sense, her kindness of heart, must decide. These seemingly minor points often make or mar the reputation of the nurse. Wiping the dishes now and then for a tired maid may be classed as nursing if thereby the patient is saved from worry. Cooking a meal for the family may be outside the province of a nurse, but in considering "common things" it is one a kind-hearted nurse may find necessary, or at least expedient.

We hear that some nurses "spoil their patients." The spirit which prompts such criticism is wrong; we are there to "spoil" the patient, if those little kindly attentions which are a matter of choice to the nurse, but which do so much to relieve the weary hours of illness, are spoiling.

The higher education, the greater knowledge of disease (its cause and prevention), the modern, up-to-date methods of treatment, a knowledge which embraces all branches of nursing, hospital and private duty, district nursing, housing of the poor, the treatment and prevention of tuberculosis, supervision of the public schools, the work of the Juvenile Court, all call for our warmest advocacy and support; but if we for one moment scorn the trivial details, the "common things of nursing," we become not a help, but a hindrance. Like the fox in the fable, we grasp for the shadow and lose the substance.

"Lo, now is come our joyful'st feast!

Let every man be jolly.

Each room with yvie leaves is drest,

And every post with bolly.

How all our neighbours' chimneys smoke,

And Christmas blocks are burning;

Their ovens they with bak't meats choke

And all their spits are turning.

Without the door let sorrow lie,

And if, for cold, it hap to die,

Wee'le bury 't in a Christmas pye,

And evermore be merry."

—Withers' Juvenilia.